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White et al.

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(54) **MODULE BYPASS SWITCH FOR
BALANCING BATTERY PACK SYSTEM
MODULES**

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USPC 320/116, 118, 120, 122
See application file for complete search history.

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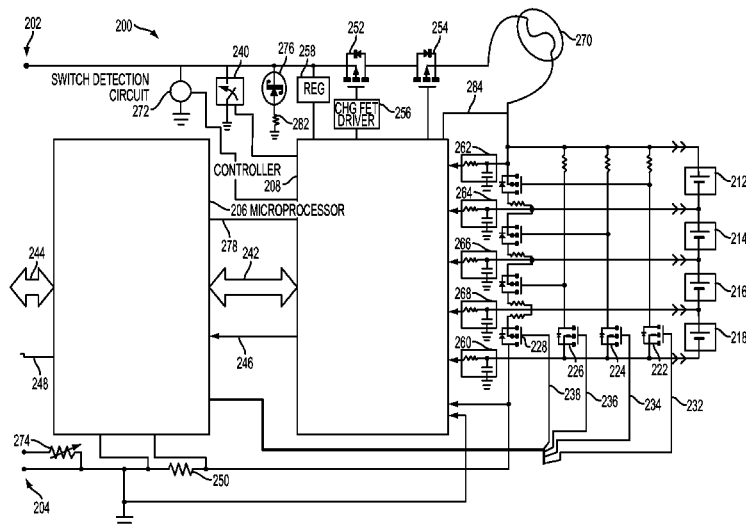
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A battery pack system module may include a module bypass switch for allowing charge current to bypass the battery pack system module. A charge switch and a discharge switch may be coupled with the module bypass switch. When other battery pack system modules are coupled in series with the module, balancing between modules may be achieved by allowing charge current to bypass the unbalanced modules and charge other modules. For example, when an unbalanced module is at a higher level of charge than other modules, a charge switch and a discharge switch in the unbalanced module de-activate and a module bypass switch activates to allow charge current to rapidly bring other modules into balance. The discharge switch and the charge switch allow the charging current to bypass the unbalanced module creating little or no additional heat dissipation.

19 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



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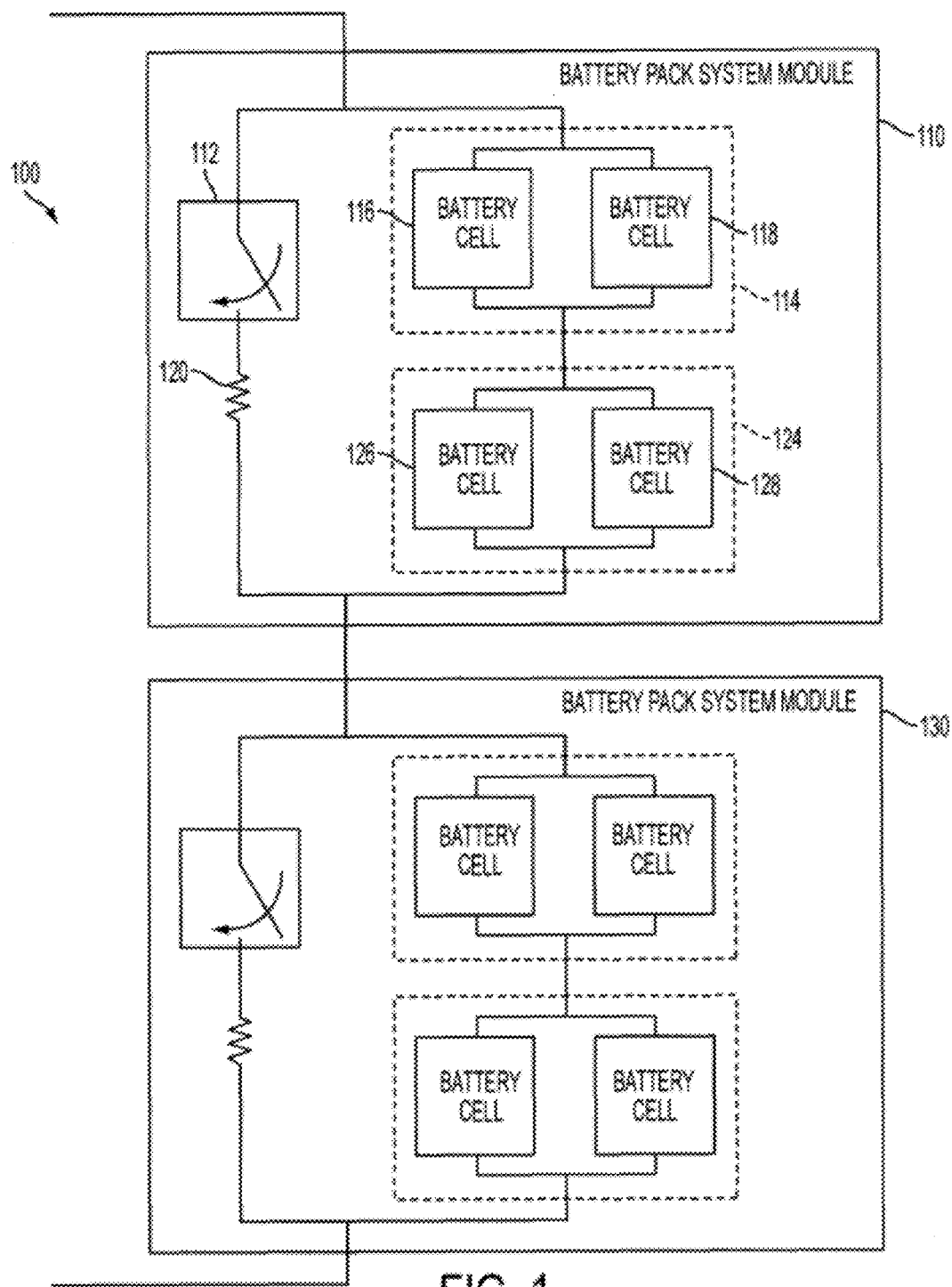
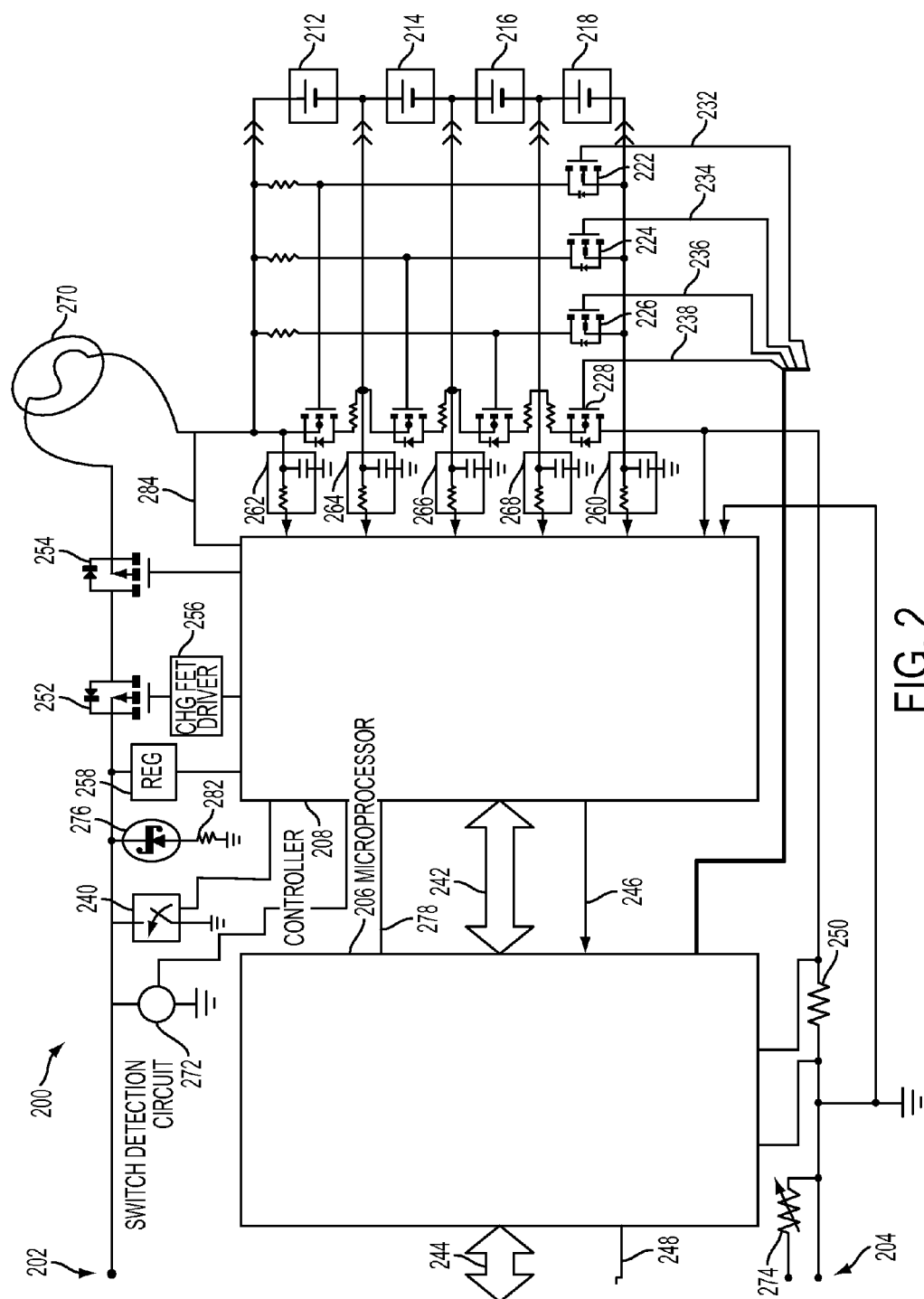


FIG. 1
PRIOR ART



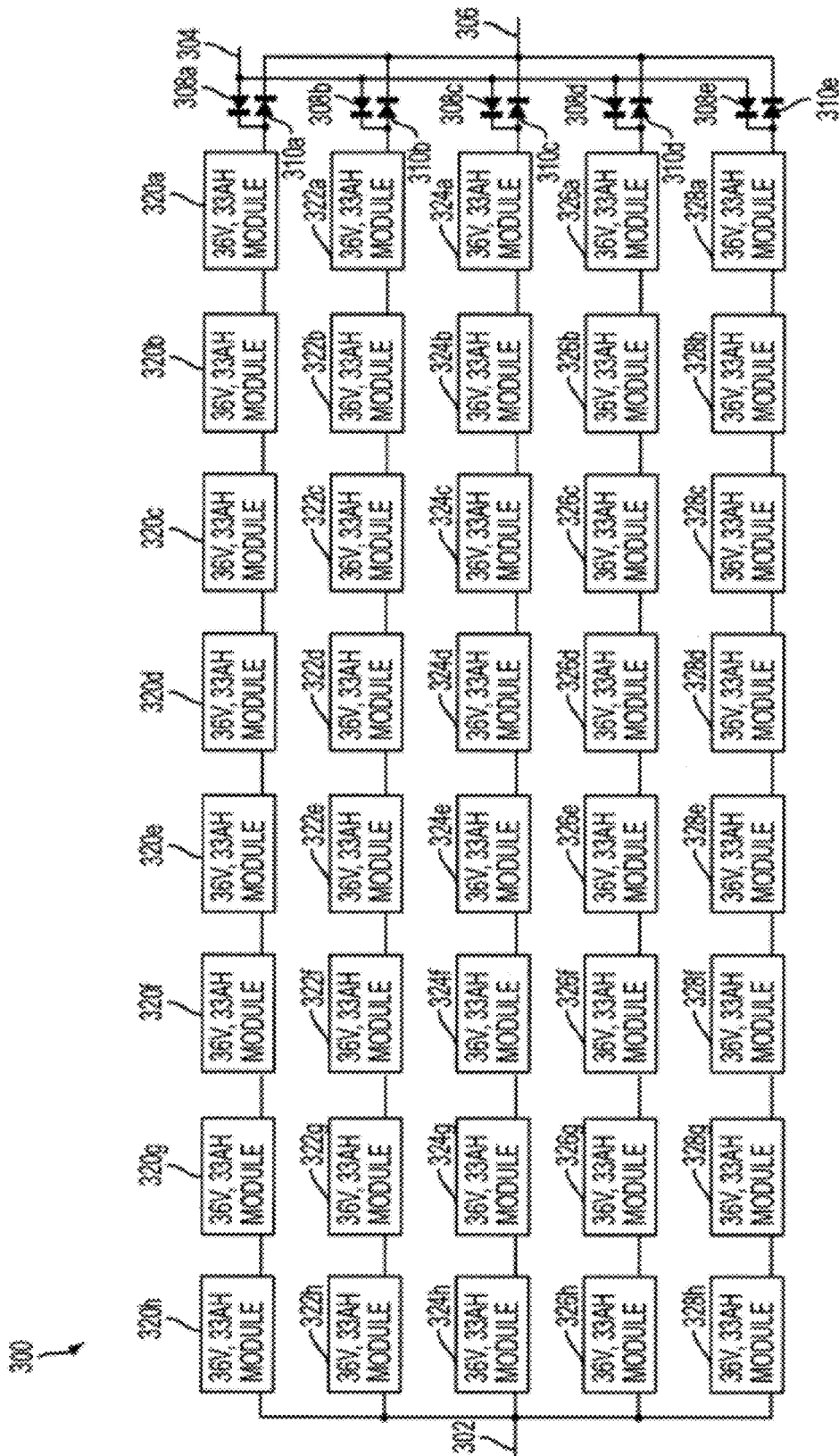


FIG. 3

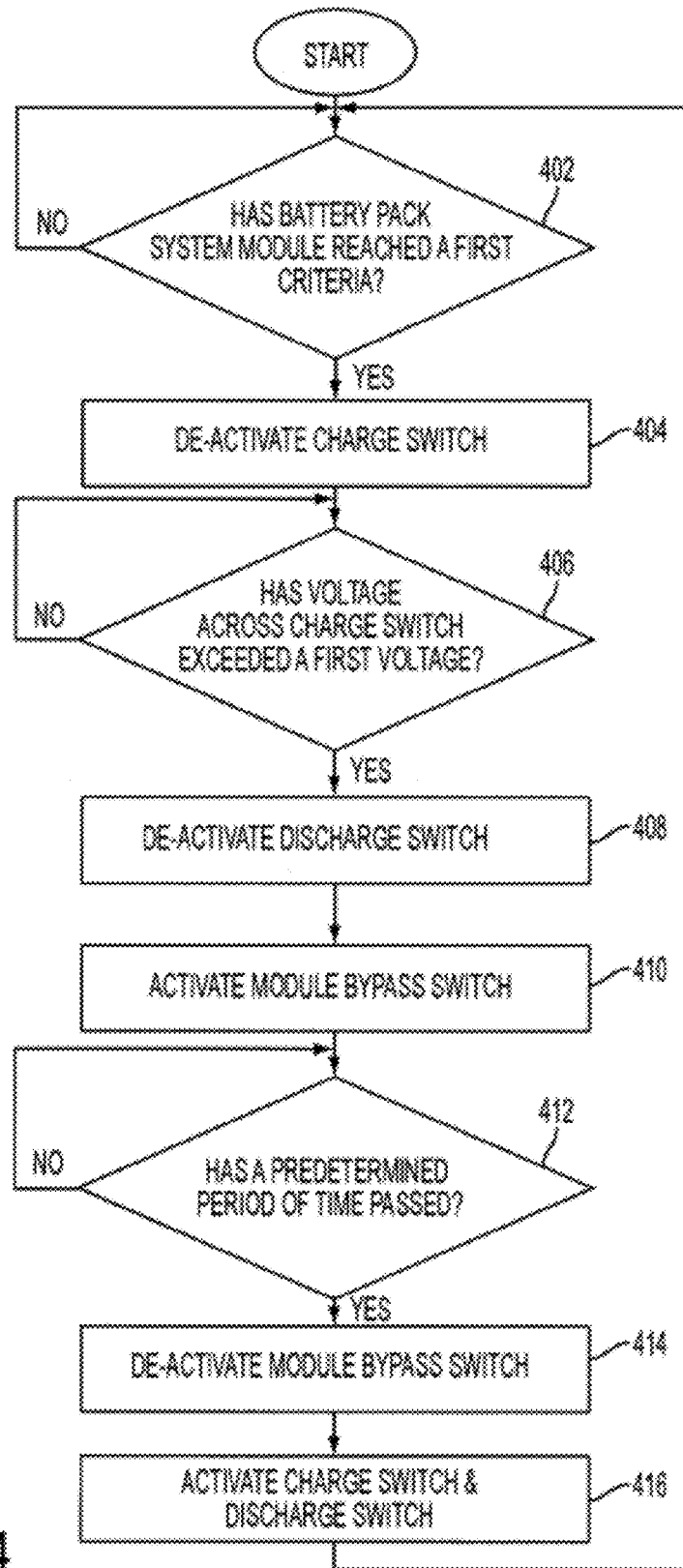


FIG. 4

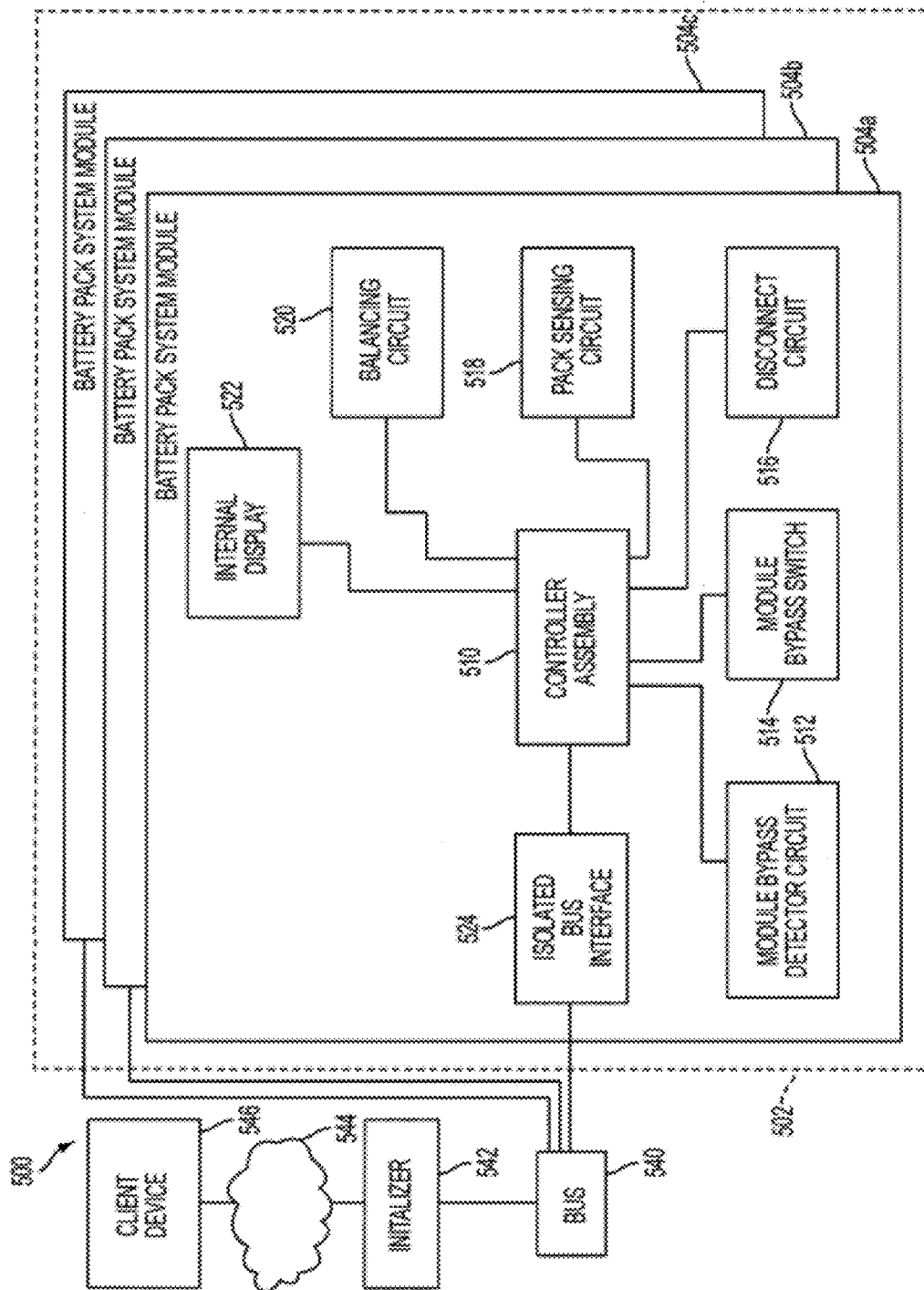


FIG. 5

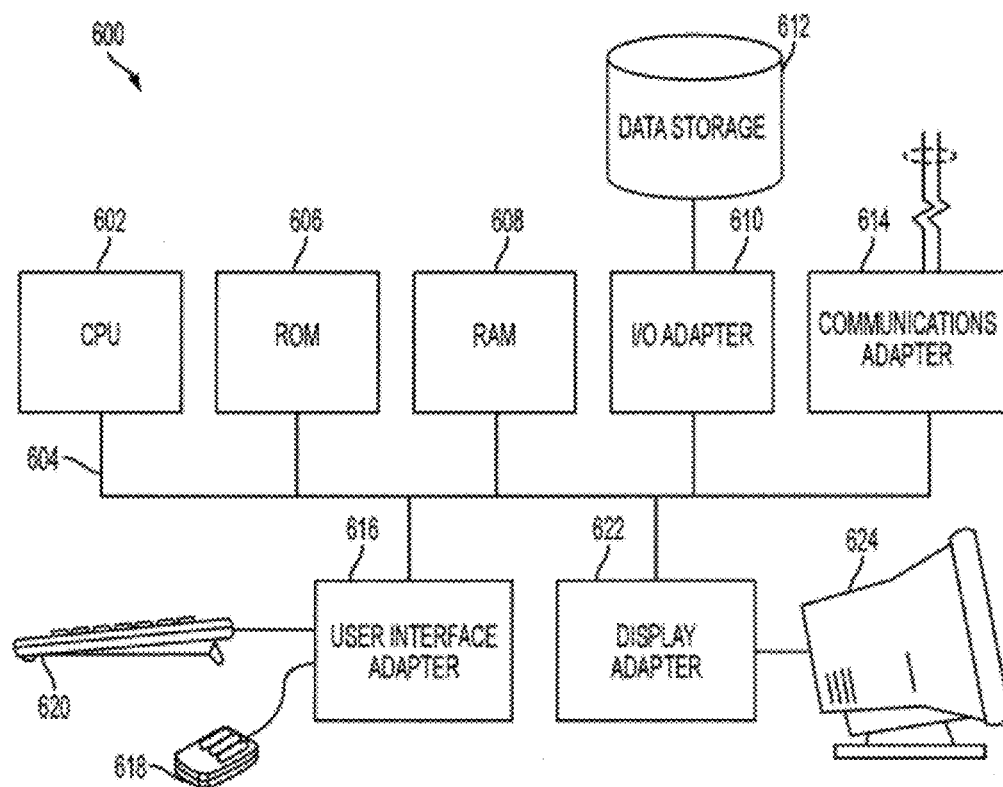


FIG. 6

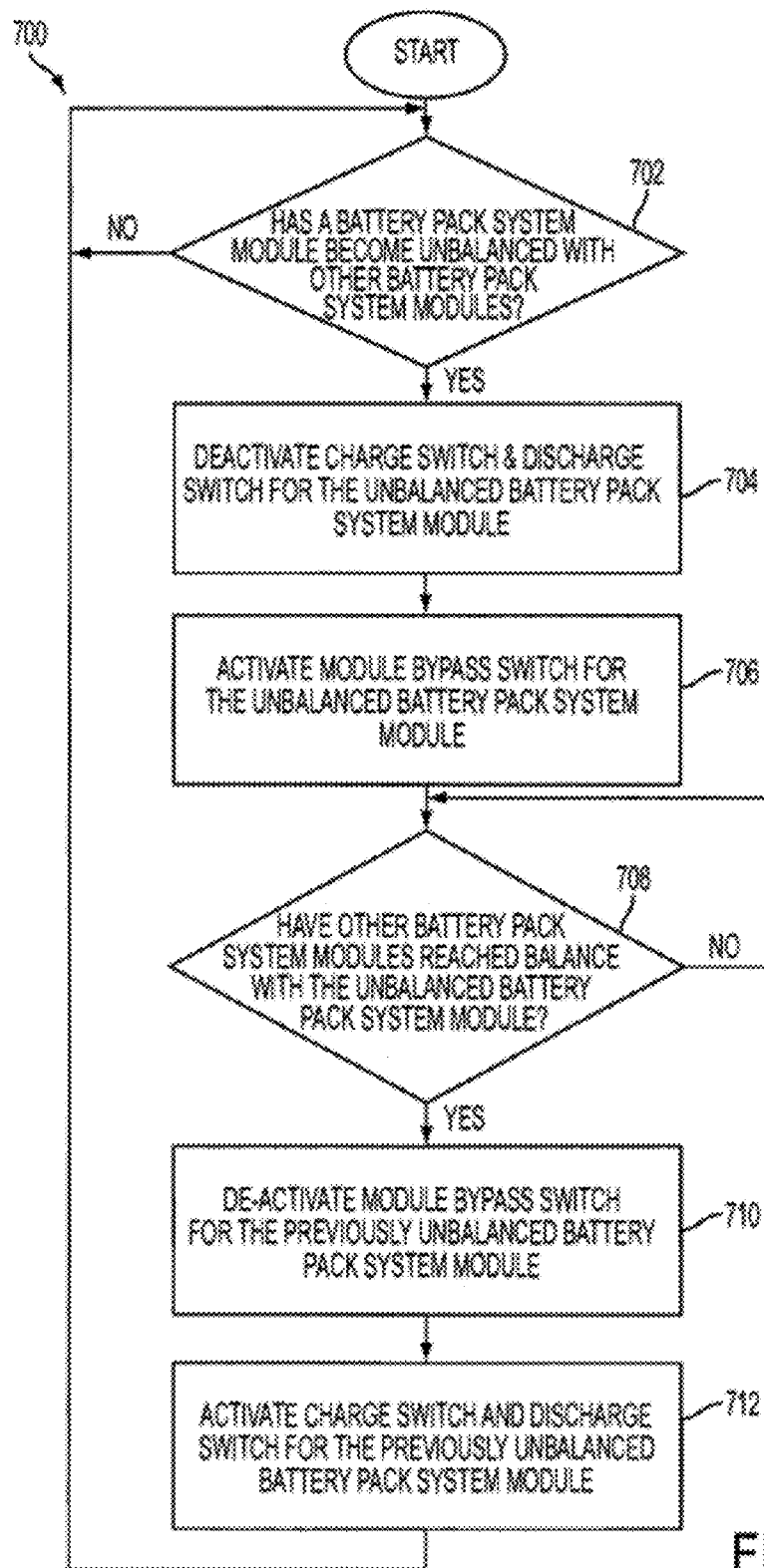


FIG. 7

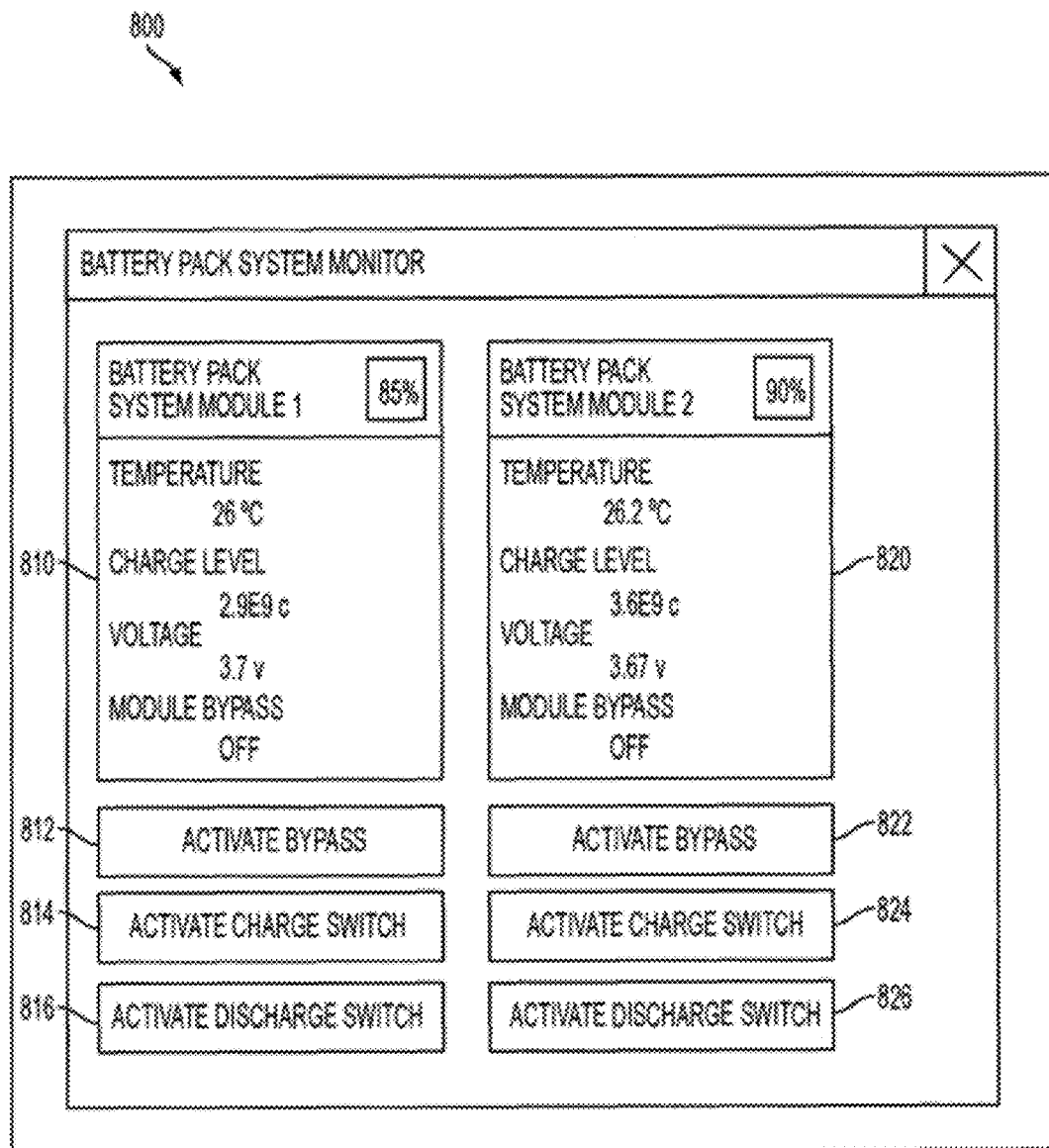


FIG. 8

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MODULE BYPASS SWITCH FOR BALANCING BATTERY PACK SYSTEM MODULES

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present disclosure generally relates to a system for balancing a plurality of battery pack system modules.

BACKGROUND

A device powered by rechargeable batteries may include several battery cells to achieve the voltage and/or current levels used by the device. For example, if a rechargeable battery cell has a nominal output voltage of 1 Volt, the a device having a 2 Volt operational level may include two battery cells placed in series. In another example, if a rechargeable battery cell has a nominal output current of 100 milliamps, then a device having a 400 milliamp operational level may include four battery cells in parallel. Battery cells in parallel and series may be combined to reach the operational levels of the device.

The battery cells may be grouped with circuitry for balancing the charge levels in the battery cells to form a battery pack system module. Multiple battery pack system modules may be combined in series or parallel to further increase the output voltage and output current available to a device coupled to the battery pack system modules. Although battery cells within a battery pack system module may be balanced by using balancing circuitry within the battery pack system module (referred to as intra-module balancing), there is a need for balancing battery pack system modules to other battery pack system modules (referred to as inter-module balancing).

One conventional solution for providing inter-module balancing includes shorting out a battery pack system module within a battery pack system with a bypass switch. FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustrating a conventional battery pack system module with a bypass switch. A battery pack system 100 includes battery pack system modules 110, 130. The module 110 includes a first group of battery cells 114 having a battery cell 116 coupled in parallel with a battery cell 118. The module 110 also includes a second group of battery cells 124 having a battery cell 126 coupled in parallel with a battery cell 128. The first group 114 is coupled in series with the second group 124.

When a bypass switch 112 activates, current through the module 110 is diverted away from the battery cells 116, 118, 126, and 128. To prevent short circuiting of the battery cells 116, 118, 126, and 128, a resistor 120 is coupled in series with the switch 112. However, the resistor 120 consumes power and generates heat in the system 100 through Joule heating. The heat generated by the resistor 120 may result in dangerous conditions within the system 100. For example, the heat may lead to a fire involving the battery cells 116, 118, 126, and 128.

Heat generated by the resistor 120 may be problematic where the system 100 is operating in an isolated environment. For example, on an undersea vehicle such as a submarine, battery pack systems may be isolated in a pressurized compartment. Thus, heat dissipated by the resistor 120 may not be carried away and result in dangerous conditions for the vehicle and operator of the vehicle.

Additionally, when one of the modules 110 or 130 of the system 100 becomes defective, the defective module may be replaced with a new module. The new module may be at a significantly different charge than existing modules of the system 100. In a conventional system, balancing of the

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replacement module with the existing modules may occur over a long period taking days or weeks to reach balance. During this time the system 100 may be unavailable for use. In the above example if one module in the vehicle is replaced, the vehicle may not be ready for operation until the modules are fully-charged and balanced. If the balancing operation consumes days or weeks, the vehicle may be out of service for this entire time period.

SUMMARY

According to one embodiment, an apparatus includes a first battery pack system module. The module includes a battery cell coupled between a first terminal and a second terminal. The module also includes a charge switch coupled in series with the battery cell and the first terminal for interrupting charging of the battery cell. The module further includes a discharge switch coupled in series with the charge switch and the first terminal for interrupting discharging of the battery cell. The module also includes a module bypass switch for shorting the first terminal and the second terminal.

According to another embodiment, a method includes charging a first battery pack system module with a charging current. The method also includes detecting, during the charging, that the first battery pack system module has reached a first criteria. The method further includes stopping charging of the first battery pack system module after detecting the first battery pack system module has reached the first criteria. The method also includes stopping discharging of the first battery pack system module after detecting the first battery pack system module has reached the first criteria. The method further includes activating a module bypass switch to pass the charging current through the first battery pack system module without charging the first battery pack system module after stopping discharging of the first battery pack system module.

According to yet another embodiment, a computer program product includes a computer-readable medium having code to monitor a first battery pack system module. The medium also includes code to disable charging of the first battery pack system module when a first criteria is met. The medium further includes code to disable discharging of the first battery pack system module when a first criteria is met. The medium also includes code to enable passing charge current through the first battery pack system module when the first criteria is met. The medium further includes code to re-enable charging of the first battery pack system module when a second criteria is met.

The foregoing has outlined rather broadly the features and technical advantages of the present invention in order that the detailed description of the invention that follows may be better understood. Additional features and advantages of the invention will be described hereinafter that form the subject of the claims of the invention. It should be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the conception and specific embodiments disclosed may be readily used as a basis for modifying or designing other structures for carrying out the same purposes of the present invention. It should also be realized by those skilled in the art that such equivalent constructions do not depart from the spirit and scope of the invention as set forth in the appended claims. The novel features that are believed to be characteristic of the invention, both as to its organization and method of operation, together with further objects and advantages will be better understood from the following description when considered in connection with the accompanying figures. It is to be expressly understood, however, that each of the figures is provided for

the purpose of illustration and description only and is not intended as a definition of the limits of the present invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a more complete understanding of the present disclosure, reference is now made to the following descriptions taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustrating a conventional battery pack system module with a bypass switch.

FIG. 2 is a circuit schematic illustrating an exemplary battery pack system module having charge, discharge, and bypass module switches according to one embodiment.

FIG. 3 is a block diagram illustrating an exemplary battery pack system having series and parallel coupled battery pack system modules according to one embodiment.

FIG. 4 is a flow chart illustrating an exemplary method of charging a battery pack system module according to one embodiment.

FIG. 5 is a block diagram illustrating an exemplary battery pack system having inter-module communication according to one embodiment.

FIG. 6 is a block diagram illustrating an initializer for an exemplary battery pack system according to one embodiment.

FIG. 7 is a flow chart illustrating an exemplary method of charging a battery pack system according to one embodiment.

FIG. 8 is a block diagram illustrating a software application for monitoring a battery pack system according to one embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

A battery pack system having a plurality of battery pack system modules may be balanced by including a module bypass switch, a charge switch, and a discharge switch in the battery pack system modules. A charge switch within the battery pack system module may be used to prevent charge current from passing through the battery cells of the battery pack system module. When one battery pack system module of a battery pack system is unbalanced with other battery pack system modules of the battery pack system, the module bypass switch may be activated to allow charge current to bypass the unbalanced battery pack system module or modules. A discharge switch within the battery pack system module may be used to prevent discharge current from passing through the battery cells of the battery pack system module when the bypass module switch is activated.

De-activation of the discharge switch in the battery pack system module prevents shorting of the battery cells in the battery pack system module, which would otherwise occur when the bypass module switch is activated. Because the discharge switch physically disconnects the battery cells from terminals of the battery pack system module, little to no power is dissipated during inter-module balancing when the bypass module switch is activated. The reduction in the dissipated power reduces heat generated in the battery pack system module, and reduces safety hazards experienced by the battery pack system and the operator of a device including the battery pack system.

The module bypass switch enables rapid balancing of battery pack system modules within a battery pack system without time-consuming and costly maintenance operations. Because the battery pack system modules are balanced during each charging of the battery pack system, the operation of the battery pack system presents reduced safety hazards to operators of equipment including the battery pack system. That is,

over-charging of battery pack system modules within the battery pack system is reduced or eliminated, which reduces fire hazards in the battery pack system. Additionally, the balancing of the battery pack system modules through inter-module balancing during charging operations extends the life of the battery pack system modules and reduces replacements costs for operating equipment including the battery pack system module.

Balancing battery pack system modules through the module bypass switch allows balancing to occur faster than in conventional battery balancing techniques. Conventional battery balancing devices may re-direct charging currents on the order of hundreds of milliAmps. By providing a low resistance path through the module bypass switch, the magnitude of re-directed current may be many times higher, such as 10 to 100 Amps. Thus, when a battery pack system module is out of balance from other battery pack system modules in a battery system, the balancing operation is completed faster. For example, a balancing operation that may take several hundred hours under a conventional balancing system may be completed in several hours or less.

FIG. 2 is a circuit schematic illustrating an exemplary battery system module having charge, discharge, and bypass module switches according to one embodiment. Battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218** are coupled in series with each other. Although not shown, additional battery cells may be coupled in series or in parallel with the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218**. A positive battery terminal **202** and a negative battery terminal **204** are coupled with the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218**. According to one embodiment, a load (not shown) may be coupled between the terminals **202** and **204** to receive an output voltage and/or output current from the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218**.

According to another embodiment, the terminals **202** and **204** may be coupled to other battery pack system modules in parallel or series (as shown below with reference to FIG. 3). According to one embodiment, the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218** may be electrochemical cells such as lithium ion (Li-ion) battery cells, nickel-metal hydroxide (NiMH) battery cells, nickel cadmium (NiCd) battery cells, lead-acid battery cells, or a combination thereof. The battery cells may also include capacitors or super capacitors.

Balancing enable transistors **222**, **224**, **226**, and **228** activate intra-cell balancing for each of the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218**, respectively. For example, when balancing enable transistor **222** is activated the battery cell **212** may discharge through a resistor to balance with the battery cells **214**, **216**, and **218**. Each of the balancing enable transistor **222**, **224**, **226**, and **228** may be controlled through balancing enable signals **232**, **234**, **236**, and **238**, respectively. The balancing enable signals **232**, **234**, **236**, and **238** may be controlled by a microprocessor **206**. Further details of intra-module balancing within a battery pack system module is described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/195,274 (published as U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2008/0309288) entitled "Method for Balancing Lithium Secondary Cells and Modules" filed on Aug. 20, 2008, to Benckenstein et al., which is hereby incorporated by reference.

An analog controller **208** measures characteristics and current status of the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218** through circuits **260**, **262**, **264**, **266**, and **268**. According to one embodiment, the circuits **260-268** are a combination of a resistor and a capacitor such as an RC circuit. The analog controller **208** may be powered by the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218** through a line **284** and/or through an external charger (not shown) through a voltage regulator **258**. The microprocessor **206** may enable or disable the balancing

enable signals **232**, **234**, **236**, and **238** by receiving information about the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218** from the analog controller **208** through a communication bus **242** such as an I²C bus. The microprocessor **206** may also receive information from the analog controller **208** through an analog signal **246**. According to one embodiment, the microprocessor **206** is powered by a voltage regulator within the analog controller **208** through a line **278**.

According to one embodiment, the microprocessor **206** may issue commands to the analog controller **208** through the bus **242** for the analog controller **208** to output signals on the analog line **246** proportional to the output voltage of one of the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218** and read battery cell voltages from the analog line **246**. An analog/digital converter (not shown) may be coupled between the microprocessor **206** and the analog line **246**. The analog/digital converter may have a resolution selected to match a desired sensitivity for receiving voltages from the analog controller **208**. For example, the analog/digital converter may be an 8-bit, 12-bit, 16-bit, 20-bit, or 24-bit converter.

A zener diode **276** and a current limiting resistor **282** may be coupled between the terminals **202** and **204** to allow low current inter-module balancing between the battery pack system module **200** and other battery pack system modules (not shown). Further details of inter-module balancing with the zener diode **276** and current limiting resistor **282** is described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/417,435 (published as U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2009/0289599) entitled "System for Balancing a Plurality of Battery Pack System Modules Connected in Series" filed on Apr. 2, 2009, to White et al., which is hereby incorporated by reference.

A discharge switch **254** may be coupled in series with the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218** and the terminal **202**. According to one embodiment, the discharge switch **254** is a field effect transistor (FET) having its body diode oriented to block discharge current from the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218**. The discharge switch may be controlled by the analog controller **208**.

A charge switch **252** may be coupled in series with the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218** and the terminal **202**. According to one embodiment, the charge switch **252** is a FET having its body diode oriented to block charge current to the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218**. The charge switch may be controlled by the analog controller **208**. According to one embodiment, a driver **256** is coupled between the charge switch **252** and the analog controller **208**.

A module bypass switch **240** may be coupled in parallel with the terminals **202** and **204** such that when the switch **240** is activated, substantially all current through the battery pack system module **200** flows through the switch **240**. According to one embodiment, the switch **240** is a FET controlled by the analog controller **208**. The switch **240** may be activated when other battery pack system modules (not shown) in a battery pack system are unbalanced with the module **200**. For example, when the battery pack system module **200** is charged to a higher level of charge than other battery pack system module coupled to the module **200**, the module bypass switch **240** may be activated to supply charge current to other modules to bring the other modules into balance with the module **200**.

Inter-module balancing may be performed by de-activating the charge switch **252** to reduce to little or none the charging current flowing through the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218**. After the charge switch **252** is de-activated inter-module balancing may be performed through the diode **276**. Higher inter-module balancing currents may be obtained by activating the module bypass switch **240**. Before the switch **240** is

activated, the discharge switch **254** may be de-activated to prevent shorting of the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218**. After de-activating the discharge switch **254**, the module bypass switch **240** may be activated to allow charging current to bypass the module **200**. After the module **200** has reached balance with other modules in the battery pack system, the module bypass switch **240** may be de-activated followed by activation of the charge switch **252** and of the discharge switch **254**.

The charge switch **252**, the discharge switch **254**, and the module bypass switch **240** may be controlled through the analog controller **208** by the microprocessor **206**. For example, the microprocessor **206** may issue commands over the bus **242** to activate or de-activate the switches **252**, **254**, and **240**. The microprocessor **206** may issue commands to maintain balance between the battery pack system module **200** and other battery pack system modules. According to one embodiment, the microprocessor **206** is configured with information about the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218** and/or applications for using the module **200**. For example, the microprocessor **206** may have information regarding open circuit voltage curves for and/or physical chemistry of the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218**. According to another embodiment, the microprocessor **206** may have application information such as whether the module **200** is configured for use in a vehicle including load information. The microprocessor **206** may use the battery cell information and/or load information in determining operation of the switches **252**, **254**, and **240**.

According to one embodiment, a fuse **270** is coupled in series between the discharge switch **254** and the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218**. The fuse **270** prevents damage to the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218** in the event of a failure in the discharge switch **254**.

A module bypass switch detection circuit **272** may be coupled in parallel with the module bypass switch **240**. The detection circuit **272** may measure the voltage across the bypass module switch **240**. The module bypass detection circuit **272** may also detect reverse voltage conditions in the battery pack system module **200**. When a low state of charge is reached in the battery pack system module, the discharge switch **254** may be de-activated to prevent over discharge of the battery pack system module **200**. The diode **276** may allow discharge current to continue to pass through the battery pack system module **200** after the discharge switch **254** is de-activated. This may cause a reverse voltage to develop across the diode **276**. The module bypass detection circuit **272** may detect the reverse voltage condition and activate the module bypass switch **240** to allow discharge current to pass through the battery pack system module **200**.

The microprocessor **206** may also monitor the battery system pack module **200** through a thermistor **274** and a current sensing resistor **250**. The thermistor **274** and the current sensing resistor **250** may be included in a pack sensing circuit. The thermistor **274** allows the microprocessor **206** to monitor the temperature of the module **200**. The microprocessor **206** may use information about the temperature of the module **200** to activate or de-activate the module bypass switch **240**, the charge switch **252**, and/or the discharge switch **254** or combinations thereof. The microprocessor **206** may also use information from the current sensing resistor **250** to monitor the charge status of the battery cells **212**, **214**, **216**, and **218**. For example, the microprocessor **206** may perform Coulomb counting with the current sensing resistor **250**. The microprocessor **206** may be coupled to the thermistor **274** and the

current sensing resistor **250** through an analog-to-digital converter (not shown) selected to match a desired sensitivity for measurements.

The microprocessor **206** and the analog controller **208** may form a controller assembly. The controller assembly communicates through a bus **244**. The bus **244** may be, for example, an RS-232 or RS-485 bus. According to one embodiment, the microprocessor **206** receives a module enable signal **248** to enable or disable the module **200**.

FIG. 3 is a block diagram illustrating an exemplary battery pack system having series and parallel coupled battery pack system modules according to one embodiment. A battery pack system **300** includes first modules **320a**, **320b**, . . . , **320h** coupled in series with each other. The system **300** also includes second modules **322a**, **322b**, . . . , **322h**, third modules **324a**, **324b**, . . . , **324h**, fourth modules **326a**, **326b**, **326h**, and fifth modules **328a**, **328b**, . . . , **328h**. Each of the modules of the second modules **322** are coupled in series with each other and the third modules **324**, fourth modules **326**, and fifth modules **328** are similarly coupled in series. The first modules **320**, second modules **322**, third modules **324**, fourth modules **326**, and fifth modules **328** are coupled in parallel between a negative terminal **302** and a positive charge terminal **304** and a positive discharge terminal **306**. Diodes **308a**, **308b**, . . . , **308e** are coupled between the positive charge terminal **304** and the modules **320**, **322**, **324**, **326**, and **328**. Diodes **310a**, **310b**, . . . , **310e** are coupled between the positive discharge terminal **306** and the modules **320**, **322**, **324**, **326**, and **328**. The diodes **308** and **310** may be isolation diodes to prevent any of the first modules **320**, second modules **322**, third modules **324**, fourth modules **326**, and fifth modules **328** from discharging any other of the modules **320**, **322**, **324**, **326**, and **328**.

Each of the modules of the first modules **320**, second modules **322**, third modules **324**, fourth modules **326**, and fifth modules **328** may include a module bypass switch as described above with reference to FIG. 2 and other balancing circuits as described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/417,435. Inter-module balancing may be effected through the use of the module bypass switch in the modules **320**, **322**, **324**, **326**, and **328**. For example, if the module **320e** is at a higher charge than the module **320d**, the module **320e** may de-activate a charge switch, de-activate a discharge switch, and activate a module bypass switch in the module **320e** to allow charge current to flow to the module **320d**. Control of inter-module balancing may be performed within each of the modules **320**, **322**, **324**, **326**, and **328** as described below with reference to FIG. 4 or by an initializer (not shown) or master battery system pack module described below with reference to FIGS. 5 and 6.

The battery pack system **300** may be charged through a power supply (not shown) coupled to the positive charge terminal **304** and the negative terminal **302**. According to one embodiment, the power supply may be a constant-current constant-voltage power supply. According to other embodiments, the power supply **332** may be a fuel cell, a solar cell, or combinations thereof.

Although FIG. 3 illustrates five parallel coupled groups of eight modules, a battery pack system may incorporate any number of modules in series or parallel. The battery pack system modules in a battery pack system may be of similar capacity, similar output voltage, and/or similar output current, or have different capacities, different output voltages, and/or different output currents. Additionally, the diodes **308** and **310** of FIG. 3 may be coupled on a high potential or low potential end of the modules **320**, **322**, **324**, **326**, and **328**.

FIG. 4 is a flow chart illustrating an exemplary method of charging a battery pack system module according to one embodiment. A flow chart **400** begins at block **402** by determining if the battery pack system module has reached a first criteria. According to one embodiment, the first criteria is a level of charge. According to other embodiments, the first criteria may be a battery cell temperature, a battery cell voltage, or other measurable characteristics of the battery cell. If the first criteria is not reached, the flow chart returns to block **402** until the first criteria is met.

When the first criteria is reached, the charge switch is de-activated at block **404**. At block **406**, the voltage across the charge switch is determined to exceed a first voltage value. If the charge switch has not exceeded a certain voltage value, the flow chart returns to block **406**. According to one embodiment, the voltage value for testing may be determined from the voltage of the power supply, the voltage of the battery pack system modules in the battery pack system, and/or the number of battery pack system modules. After the charge switch voltage exceeds a certain voltage value, the discharge switch is de-activated at block **408** and a module bypass switch is activated at **410**. Thus, charge current is allowed to pass through the battery pack system module through a low resistance path without discharging the battery cells of the module.

A timer may be started after activating the module bypass switch, and, when a certain time period has passed at block **412**, the module bypass switch is de-activated at block **414**. The charge switch and discharge switch may be re-activated at block **416**.

The method of FIG. 4 provides for inter-module balancing of a battery system by allowing a battery pack system module to have autonomous control over charging of battery cells within each respective battery pack system module without communication to a central computer. According to another embodiment, the battery pack system module may be in communication with an initializer, such as a microcontroller, for controlling the balancing of battery pack system modules within a battery pack system. FIG. 5 is a block diagram illustrating an exemplary battery pack system having a plurality of battery pack system modules according to one embodiment.

A system **500** includes a battery pack system **502** having battery pack system modules **504a**, **504b**, **504c**. The battery pack system module **504a** includes a controller assembly **510** for interfacing with a bus **540** and components within the battery pack system module **504a**. The controller assembly **510** may include analog controllers, digital controllers, and/or microprocessors. According to one embodiment, the battery pack system module **504a** includes an isolated bus interface **524** for isolating the battery pack system module **504a** from the bus **540**, which may be operating at a different potential.

The controller assembly **510** may interface with a module bypass detector circuit **512** and module bypass switch **514**. By sensing an output from the module bypass detector circuit **512**, the controller assembly may determine when to activate and de-activate the module bypass switch **514** and a disconnect circuit **516**. The disconnect circuit **516** may include a charge switch and a discharge switch. The controller assembly **510** may also interface with a pack sensing circuit **518** and the disconnect circuit **516**. The pack sensing circuit **518** may report to the controller assembly **510** characteristics of battery cells (not illustrated) located within the battery pack system module **504a**. For example, the pack sensing circuit **518** may monitor charge levels of the battery cells with Coulomb counters or battery cell temperatures with thermistors.

The coulomb counters and/or thermistors may interface with the controller assembly 510 through an analog/digital converter (ADC). The controller assembly 510 may use information obtained from the pack sensing circuit 518 to determine activation and de-activation of a charge switch and a discharge switch within the disconnect circuit 516.

Additionally, the battery pack system module 504a may include an internal display 522 to communicate with an operator of the battery pack system 502 a status of the battery pack system module 504a. For example, the battery pack system module 504a may include a light emitting diode (LED) indicating the status of the module bypass switch 514. In another example, the internal display 522 may be a liquid crystal display (LCD) indicating the charge level of battery cells within the battery pack system module 504a.

An initializer 542 coupled to the bus 540 may communicate with each of the battery pack system modules 504a, 504b, 504c. The initializer 542 may accumulate information from each of the battery pack system modules 504a, 504b, 504c to make decisions regarding the charging operation of the battery pack system modules 504a, 504b, 504c. For example, by monitoring the charge levels of the different battery pack system modules 504a, 504b, 504c, the initializer 542 may instruct an unbalanced battery pack system module to activate the module bypass switch. According to one embodiment, the initializer 542 may be coupled to an external display device (not shown) for displaying the status of the battery pack system 502 and/or receiving operator commands for the battery pack system 502. The initializer 542 may monitor the battery pack system 502 for one or more events such as, for example, health of the battery cells, capacity of the battery cells, overcharge, over discharge, over current, short circuit current, over temperature, under temperature, state of charge of the battery cells, and/or balance of the battery cells. According to one embodiment, the initializer 542 may be programmed with new computer instructions or configuration settings through, for example, a flash update to an EEPROM chip storing computer instructions in the initializer 542.

According to one embodiment, the initializer 542 may have control of all internal cell balancing circuits within a module for intra-module balancing as well as control over the module bypass switch for each of the modules for inter-module balancing. Thus, the initializer may perform inter-module balancing and intra-module balancing. The combination of inter-module balancing and intra-module balancing allows continuous balancing in any battery mode including charge mode, discharge mode, quiescent mode, and storage mode. For example, when modules are unbalanced, if inter-module balancing is unavailable, intra-module balancing may be performed to balance the modules with one charge cycle. According to one embodiment, the initializer 542 may activate all balancing circuits in a module in order to balance the module with other modules.

The initializer 542 may be coupled to a network 544 for communicating with a client device 546. The initializer 542 may allow the client device 546 to monitor conditions within each of the battery pack system modules 504a, 504b, 504c and/or control components within the battery pack system modules 504a, 504b, 504c. For example, an operator at the client device 546 may instruct the initializer 542 to activate the module bypass switch 514 of the battery pack system module 504a. In another example, an operator at the client device 546 may adjust settings within the initializer 542 such as current limits, voltage limits, temperature limits, charge levels, and/or balancing settings.

According to one embodiment, the initializer 542 may be removed from the system 500 by designating the controller assembly 510 of the battery pack system module 504a, or another one of the battery pack system modules 504a, 504b, 504c, to function as a master controller. The master controller communicates with other battery pack system module controller assemblies and may provide access for an operator on a client device, an internal display, and/or an external display.

FIG. 6 is a block diagram illustrating a client device for an exemplary battery pack system according to one embodiment. A computer system 600 includes a central processing unit (CPU) 602 coupled to a system bus 604. The CPU 602 may be a general purpose CPU or microprocessor, graphics processing unit (GPU), microcontroller, or the like. The present embodiments are not restricted by the architecture of the CPU 602 so long as the CPU 602, whether directly or indirectly, supports the modules and operations as described herein. The CPU 602 may execute the various logical instructions according to the present embodiments. Logical instructions may be stored in the CPU 602, in a battery pack system module (not shown), or in an initializer (not shown).

The computer system 600 may also include random access memory (RAM) 608, which may be, for example, SRAM, DRAM, SDRAM, or the like. The computer system 600 may use RAM 608 to store the various data structures used by a software application having code to electronically monitor and control battery pack system modules. The computer system 600 may also include read only memory (ROM) 606 which may be PROM, EPROM, EEPROM, optical storage, or the like. The ROM may store configuration information for booting the computer system 600. The RAM 608 and the ROM 606 hold user and system data.

The computer system 600 may also include an input/output (I/O) adapter 610, a communications adapter 614, a user interface adapter 616, and a display adapter 622. The I/O adapter 610 and/or the user interface adapter 616 may, in certain embodiments, enable a user to interact with the computer system 600 in order to input operating parameters for a battery pack system module. In a further embodiment, the display adapter 622 may display a graphical user interface for monitoring and/or controlling battery pack system modules.

The I/O adapter 610 may connect one or more storage devices 612, such as one or more of a hard drive, a compact disk (CD) drive, a floppy disk drive, and a tape drive, to the computer system 600. The communications adapter 614 may be adapted to couple the computer system 600 to a network, which may be one or more of a LAN, WAN, and/or the Internet. The user interface adapter 616 couples user input devices, such as a keyboard 620 and a pointing device 618, to the computer system 600. The display adapter 622 may be driven by the CPU 602 to control the display on the display device 624.

The applications of the present disclosure are not limited to the architecture of computer system 600. Rather the computer system 600 is provided as an example of one type of computing device that may be adapted to perform the functions of a client device 546. For example, any suitable processor-based device may be utilized including without limitation, personal data assistants (PDAs), tablet computers, smartphones, computer game consoles, or multi-processor servers. Moreover, the systems and methods of the present disclosure may be implemented on application specific integrated circuits (ASIC), very large scale integrated (VLSI) circuits, or other circuitry. In fact, persons of ordinary skill in the art may utilize any number of suitable structures capable of executing logical operations according to the described embodiments.

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External control of a battery pack system with an initializer may be performed when the initializer communicates with controller assemblies within the battery pack system modules. FIG. 7 is a flow chart illustrating an exemplary method of charging a battery pack system according to one embodiment. A flow chart 700 begins at block 702 where an initializer decides if a battery pack system module has become unbalanced with other battery pack system modules within a battery pack system. In one example, the battery pack system module may be determined to be charged to a higher level than other battery pack system modules in the battery pack system. If a battery pack system is unbalanced the flow chart continues to block 704. At block 704 the charge switch in the unbalanced battery pack system module may be de-activated to prevent further charging of battery cells within the unbalanced battery pack system module. Additionally, at block 704 the discharge switch is de-activated to prevent shorting of the battery cells when the module bypass switch is activated. At block 706 the module bypass switch for the unbalanced battery pack system module is activated.

At block 708 it is determined if the battery pack system modules have reached a balanced state with the unbalanced battery pack module. When balance is reached, the flow chart continues to block 710. At block 710 the module bypass switch for the previously unbalanced battery pack system module is de-activated. At block 712 the charge switch and the discharge switch for the previously unbalanced battery pack system module are activated. The method illustrated in FIG. 7 may be performed by an initializer, a client device, or a battery pack system module configured as a master module to control other modules. When the initializer, client device, or master module is coupled to a display or a client device, software may be executed to display a user interface for monitoring and/or controlling the battery pack system.

FIG. 8 is a block diagram illustrating a software application for monitoring a battery pack system according to one embodiment. A software application 800 may include displays 810, 820 for monitoring battery pack system modules inside of a battery pack system. The displays 810, 820 may include information such as, for example, temperature, charge level, voltage, and/or status of the module bypass switch for each battery pack system module in the battery pack system. Additionally, the software application 800 may include buttons 812, 822 for activating module bypass switches within the battery pack system modules monitored in displays 810, 820, respectively. Charge switches and/or discharge switches may be activated and de-activated automatically by the software when the buttons 812 and 822 are actuated. According to one embodiment, the display also includes separate buttons 814 and 824 for activating and de-activating a charge switch of each module and buttons 816 and 826 for activating and de-activating a discharge switch of each module. The software application 800 may be stored on a computer readable medium such as, for example, a compact disc (CD), a hard disk drive (HDD), a digital versatile disc (DVD), flash memory, or the like.

The battery pack system of the present disclosure allows balancing of battery pack system modules within the battery pack system with a module bypass switch, charge switch, and discharge switch. The balancing process may be performed continuously through charging of the battery pack system modules resulting in increased life from the battery pack system modules and reduced safety hazards from unbalanced battery pack system modules. Balancing times may be reduced with the module bypass switch, charge switch, and discharge switch because of higher charging current passing through the modules. The faster balancing times may be

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achieved with little or no additional heat dissipation in the battery pack system module. Reducing the heat dissipation prevents dangerous conditions from developing in the battery pack system module.

Faster balancing may be particularly advantageous when replacing battery pack system modules. For example, if one of the battery pack system modules is replaced, the replacement battery pack system module may be rapidly brought into balance with other battery pack system modules by activating module bypass switches, charge switches, and discharge switches to direct charge current to the unbalanced battery pack system modules.

Although the present disclosure and its advantages have been described in detail, it should be understood that various changes, substitutions, and alterations can be made herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the disclosure as defined by the appended claims. Moreover, the scope of the present application is not intended to be limited to the particular embodiments of the process, machine, manufacture, composition of matter, means, methods, and steps described in the specification. As one of ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate from the present disclosure, processes, machines, manufacture, compositions of matter, means, methods, or steps, presently existing or later to be developed that perform substantially the same function or achieve substantially the same result as the corresponding embodiments described herein may be utilized according to the present disclosure. Accordingly, the appended claims are intended to include within their scope such processes, machines, manufacture, compositions of matter, means, methods, or steps.

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus, comprising:

a first battery pack system module, comprising:

a plurality of battery cells coupled between a first terminal and a second terminal;

a charge switch coupled in series with the plurality of battery cells and the first terminal for interrupting charging of the plurality of battery cells;

a discharge switch coupled in series with the charge switch and the first terminal for interrupting discharging of the plurality of battery cells;

a module bypass switch for shorting the first terminal and the second terminal, wherein the charge switch and the discharge switch are between the module bypass switch and the plurality of battery cells;

a detection circuit for detecting a voltage across the charge switch; and

a processor coupled to the module bypass switch and to the detection circuit, in which the processor is configured to:

detect the battery pack system module has reached a first criteria;

de-activate the charge switch after detecting the battery pack system module reached the first criteria;

detect, from the detection circuit, when the voltage exceeds a first voltage after de-activating the charge switch;

de-activate the discharge switch after detecting the voltage exceeds the first voltage; and

autonomously activate, after detecting the voltage exceeds the first voltage, the module bypass switch to short the first terminal and the second terminal to provide charging current to a second battery pack system module.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising a zener diode in series with a resistor, the zener diode and the resistor in parallel with the module bypass switch.

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3. The apparatus of claim 1, in which the module bypass switch is a field effect transistor (FET).

4. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising a second battery pack system module coupled in series with the first battery pack system module.

5. The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising:
a controller assembly coupled to the charge switch, the discharge switch, and the module bypass switch;
a bus coupled to the controller assembly; and
an initializer coupled to the bus.

6. The apparatus of claim 5, further comprising a pack sensing circuit coupled to the controller assembly.

7. The apparatus of claim 5, further comprising a fuse coupled between the discharge switch and the battery cell.

8. The apparatus of claim 5, further comprising an isolated bus interface coupled between the bus and the controller assembly.

9. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the charge switch comprises a field effect transistor (FET) having a body diode oriented to block a charge current received at the first terminal from reaching the plurality of battery cells while the charge switch is de-activated, and wherein the discharge switch comprises a field effect transistor (FET) having a body diode oriented to block discharge current from the plurality of battery cells.

10. A method, comprising:

charging a plurality of battery cells of a first battery pack system module with a charging current;

detecting, by the first battery pack system module during the charging, that the first battery pack system module has reached a first criteria;

stopping charging, by the first battery pack system module, of the first battery pack system module after detecting the first battery pack system module has reached the first criteria by de-activating a charge switch of the first battery pack system module;

detecting, by the first battery pack system module, that a voltage across the charge switch of the first battery pack system module exceeds a first voltage after deactivating the charging switch;

stopping discharging, by the first battery pack system module, of the first battery pack system module, after detecting the voltage exceeds the first voltage, by de-activating a discharge switch of the first battery pack system module coupled between a module bypass switch and the plurality of battery cells; and

activating, autonomously by the first battery pack system module, the module bypass switch to pass the charging current through the first battery pack system module to a second battery pack system module without charging the first battery pack system module after detecting the voltage exceeds the first voltage.

11. The method of claim 10, in which the first criteria is a first level of charge.

12. The method of claim 10, further comprising charging the second battery pack system module with the charging current, in which the second battery pack system module is in series with the first battery pack system module.

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13. The method of claim 10, further comprising:

detecting, while the module bypass switch is active, that a second criteria is reached;

de-activating the module bypass switch after detecting that the second criteria is reached; and

charging the first battery pack system module with the charging current after detecting that the second criteria is reached.

14. The method of claim 13, in which the second criteria is a pre-determined period of time passing after activating the module bypass switch.

15. The method of claim 10, wherein the charge switch comprises a field effect transistor (FET) having a body diode oriented to block a charge current received at the first terminal from reaching the plurality of battery cells while the charge switch is de-activated, and wherein the discharge switch comprises a field effect transistor (FET) having a body diode oriented to block discharge current from the plurality of battery cells.

16. A computer program product, comprising:

a non-transitory computer-readable medium comprising:

code to monitor a first battery pack system module having a plurality of battery cells;

code to disable charging of the first battery pack system module when a first criteria is met by de-activating a charge switch of the first battery pack system module;

code to detect a voltage across the charge switch of the first battery pack system module exceeds a first voltage after de-activating the charge switch;

code to disable discharging of the first battery pack system module when the voltage exceeds the first voltage by de-activating a discharge switch of the first battery pack system module;

code to autonomously enable passing charge current through the first battery pack system module to a second battery pack system module after detecting the voltage exceeds the first voltage by activating a module bypass switch in the first battery pack system module, wherein the discharge switch is coupled between the module bypass switch and the plurality of battery cells; and

code to re-enable charging of the first battery pack system module when a second criteria is met.

17. The computer program product of claim 16, in which the medium further comprises:

code to monitor at least the second battery pack system module; and

code to enable charging of the second battery pack system module when charging of the first battery pack system module is disabled.

18. The computer program product of claim 16, in which the medium further comprises code to remotely monitor the charging of the first battery pack system module.

19. The computer program product of claim 16, in which the medium further comprises code to activate balancing circuits of the first battery pack system module to perform intra-module balancing.

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